

The Monitor

April 2015 – June 2015

Dear Readers,

This edition of *The Monitor* covers our office's activities from late April to the beginning of June. We publish the Monitor to keep you informed about our work in the office of the [Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism](#) (SEAS).

We traveled to Argentina, Brazil, and Chile in late April, and then to Belgium, France, Jerusalem, Spain, Tunisia, and the West Bank in May. These overseas trips included attending conferences and meeting with NGOs, Jewish communal leadership and European government officials. Additionally, our office met with civil society partners in the U.S. to reinforce USG efforts on combating global anti-Semitism.

For more regular updates, you can follow me on Twitter ([@SEASForman](#)) where I comment on the latest developments, issues, and events surrounding anti-Semitism and the protection of Jewish communities around the world.

Thank you for your continued interest and support of our work.

All the best,

Ira Forman



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International Travel

April 2015

Chile



SEAS Forman and U.S. Embassy officer near La Moneda Presidential Palace (State Department photo)

In April, we met with heads of Jewish organizations in Chile who noted an increase in the number of anti-Semitic incidents in their communities during the 2014 Gaza conflict. These incidents included hate speech on social media and some acts of vandalism. During these incidents, the Jewish community sought assistance, protection and guidance from the government. Nonetheless, community members believed that the Ministry of Interior – key for internal security – would have been more effective in providing immediate security assistance when the community felt most threatened. Religious leaders noted that the number of anti-Semitic incidents has stabilized since the events of last summer. We spoke with officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on procuring more security for the Jewish community and they agreed to raise this with the Ministry of Interior.

Argentina

In my visit to Argentina, Jewish leaders spoke about the Argentinian government's relationship with Iran, President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's charges that Jewish community leadership was bound up in an anti-Argentinian conspiracy, and the investigation into the death of Argentinian prosecutor Alberto Nisman. They were also concerned with the lack of progress in the investigation of the bombing of the Jewish community's AMIA building which resulted in the death of 85 individuals in 1994. More recently, Argentine Jewish leaders and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) condemned President Kirchner's statements on Argentina's economic problems, in which she compared the Shakespearean villain, Shylock, to the investment funds that contribute to Argentina's national debt. The ADL released a statement saying it has "deep concern that President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner is once again promoting anti-Semitic stereotypes." The Department of State is following the situation very

closely and shares the concerns of the community that singling out members of a religious minority group as engaged in conspiracies against Argentina is a very dangerous precedent.

Brazil



SEAS Forman meeting with Jewish community leaders in Sao Paulo, Brazil (State Department photo)

On April 22 and 23 we met with Brazilian Jewish and interfaith community leaders. Many leaders agreed that religious tolerance and interfaith collaboration is a strength of Brazilian society and that overt anti-Semitism remains limited in the country. However, concern was expressed about increased anti-Semitism in Brazil during the conflict in the summer of 2014. A number of community leaders also underscored the need for a legal framework to combat terrorism. When discussing ways to promote religious tolerance, many community members highlighted the crucial role that Pope Francis has played in denouncing anti-Semitism. They also emphasized the need for a social media strategy to combat hate speech.

May 2015

Belgium

In early May, our office spoke on a panel at the American Jewish Committee's (AJC) "A Defining Moment for Europe" conference on combating rising anti-Semitism. The panel addressed an audience of Jewish leaders and EU government officials about governmental responses to anti-Semitism. Our panel discussion figured prominently in AJC's "[Call for Action](#)" plan, which outlines specific steps the EU can take to address anti-Semitism. Our office also had conversations with leaders of the Belgian Jewish community, who noted that the new federal government, which took office in November 2014, was far more willing to speak out and denounce anti-Semitism than its predecessor. We met with the Director for Fundamental rights and Union citizenship in the Directorate-General for JUSTICE of the European Commission, Paul Nemitz, to discuss the question of whether a Special Envoy to combat anti-Semitism could be created for the European Union.

Tunisia



El Ghriba synagogue on the Tunisian island of Djerba (State Department photo)

After our stop in Brussels, we traveled to Djerba to participate in the annual Lag B'Omer pilgrimage. The pilgrimage to the Ghriba synagogue – purported to be the oldest synagogue in Africa – drew an estimated 500 pilgrims despite security concerns. Djerba's Jewish community is one of the last functioning Jewish communities left in the Arab world. Unlike most Jewish diaspora communities it has a very young demographic profile, with nearly half of the population 20 years of age or younger. Following the pilgrimage, we met with Tunisia's Minister of Tourism, the Governor of Medenine (the province to which Djerba belongs) and leaders of both the Djerba and Tunis Jewish communities. The Governor spoke to us about threats of terrorism coming from the Libyan border and government initiatives to protect the Jewish population. While in Djerba, we received a tour of all the major Jewish facilities, including schools, libraries and cemeteries.



SEAS Forman with members of the Djerban Jewish community (State Department photo)



The Lag B'Omer pilgrimage led by the Jewish community (State Department photo)

France

In Marseille, we met with Michele Teboul, the president of the Marseille branch of the CRIF (Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions), the umbrella organization for all French Jewish groups, who spoke about her concern that the threat of violence is growing in Marseille.

Spain

In Spain, we met with the Centro Sefarad-Israel, a Spanish governmental institution that promotes Jewish cultural and historical awareness in Spain and abroad. We also met with the Presidents of the Jewish Community and the Jewish Federation of Madrid. According to some surveys there are relatively high levels of anti-Semitic attitudes in Spain, and yet acts of violence against the community are rare. Even so, the Jewish community has growing concerns about security and the potential for the type of violence which has spread in other parts of Western Europe. The leaders spoke positively about a newly-passed federal law which grants citizenship rights to the descendants of Sephardic Jews that were exiled in 1492. In addition to these meetings, our office attended a roundtable in Madrid's Bet-El Community (the city's non-orthodox community) and toured the old Jewish quarter in the ancient city of Toledo.



Meeting with the Masortí Bet-El Jewish community of Madrid
(State Department Photo)



Visiting the old Jewish quarter in Toledo, Spain
(State Department Photo)

Jerusalem and the West Bank

In Jerusalem, we were invited to moderate a panel at the 5th Global Forum for Combatting Anti-Semitism – a biennial gathering of senior government officials, religious leaders and academics, among other influential leaders. The forum, held on May 12-14, was hosted by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and focused on two themes this year: confronting anti-Semitism and hate speech in social media and assessing the rise of anti-Semitism in European cities and their responses. Following the conference, we visited the Mount of Olives where we saw firsthand the desecration of Jewish burial sites. During the tour of the cemetery we spoke with representatives of Jewish NGOs who recounted incidents of attacks against mourners trying to visit the grave sites of family and friends. We also took the opportunity to speak with representatives of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and other NGOs to explore the most effective methods to educate youth and instill values of coexistence and respect for others.

During our trip to the West Bank our office met with around fifteen young adults working to advocate for a two-state solution and foster relationships among Jewish and Muslim youth. We discussed global anti-Semitism and the impact of interfaith dialogue on mitigating anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment. We also had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Barakat Fawzi Hasan. Dr. Hasan participated in a 2013 State Department-sponsored trip of imams and Islamic scholars to Dachau and Auschwitz. Dr. Hasan continues to be engaged in efforts to foster dialogue between Muslims and Jews.



SEAS Forman meeting with Dr. Hasan at the King David Hotel
(State Department photo)

Events

Meetings with Civil Society

Our office met with various stakeholders in the Jewish community and civil society members throughout the spring to discuss U.S. foreign policy on tackling anti-Semitism. We travelled to meet with the Jewish Federations of Greater Portland, Kansas City, Austin and Northern New Jersey as well as the Jewish Community Relations Council of San Francisco. In early June, we briefed leaders of both the Jewish Funders Network and the American Jewish Committee on the department's activities to combat anti-Semitism. In a meeting with the Head of the Task Force of the German Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Chairmanship, our office exchanged ideas on how the OSCE can counter anti-Semitism in Europe. In Washington, we also led a section on "Anti-Semitism, Pluralism and Religious Identity" to train Foreign Service Officers on recognizing the complex nature of anti-Semitism in 2015. The class was particularly interested in how we define anti-Semitism, especially when criticism of Israel can become anti-Semitic.

President Obama Addresses Audience at Adas Israel



President Obama speaking at Adas Israel (State Department photo)

On May 22, in honor of Jewish American Heritage Month, President Obama addressed an audience at the Adas Israel Congregation in Washington, DC. His [remarks](#) included a section on anti-Semitism, noting the Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice's Solidarity Sabbath to confirm the freedom of religion and belief. He stated: "...that ... sense of shared values also compel me to speak out -- compel all of us to speak out -- against the scourge of anti-Semitism wherever it exists... Anti-Semitism is, and always will be, a threat to broader human values to which we all must aspire....And that's why, tonight, for the first time ever, congregations around the world are celebrating a Solidarity Shabbat. It's a chance for leaders to publicly stand against anti-Semitism and bigotry in all of its forms. And I'm proud to be a part of this movement, and I'm proud that six ambassadors from Europe are joining us today. And their presence here -- our presence together -- is a reminder that we are not doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past. Our traditions, our history, can help us chart a better course as long as we are mindful of that history and those traditions, and we are vigilant in speaking out and standing up against what is wrong."

Online Outreach

State.gov

I encourage all of you to visit our page <http://www.state.gov/s/rga/seas/index.htm> on the U.S. Department of State's website. Here you will find information about our office, as well as remarks, press releases, past issues of The Monitor, and photos. I also urge you to go to the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor page at <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/index.htm>.

HumanRights.gov

You can also visit [HumanRights.gov](http://www.humanrights.gov), which is the U.S. government's official website for international human rights related information.

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